

# A focus on **skilled** trades

Renovations at MCC's Greenville campus support changing industry needs

**T**his fall, Montcalm Community College completed a \$750,000 upgrade at the Bill Braman Family Center for Education, supporting the transformation of the Greenville campus into a center for skilled trades training.

MCC President Bob Ferrentino said the project is part of a larger collegewide facilities master plan aimed at building capacity to support future educational needs in the communities served by the college.

"We are continuing to respond to employer needs as manufacturers change the way they do business to remain competitive in the global economy," Ferrentino said.

"The need for the project at the Braman Center was immediate due to the existing enrollment in our welding program. It supports our partnerships with area businesses to provide the training they need to continue to grow and educate their workforce for current and future jobs," he added.

Since 2008, MCC has experienced increases in demand for training in several skilled trades areas including welding, technical drafting and design, industrial technology and electricity/electronics. During this time numbers of apprentices have steadily increased with more than 200 students from 24 companies enrolled in apprenticeship programs this fall.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), demand for welders, solderers, cutters and brazers has seen steady growth. Due to the nation's aging infrastructure, the BLS estimates the trend will continue as more workers will be needed to help rebuild bridges, highways and buildings.

According to MCC Vice President for Academic Affairs Rob Spohr, the demand for welding instruction has more than doubled in some classes during this timeframe, which had MCC's open lab operating over capacity. There simply wasn't enough lab time



*Ryan Kuczynski  
of Edmore is an  
apprenticeship  
student at MCC.*





*MCC student Ryan Kuczynski of Edmore works in the open lab on the college's Greenville campus.*

for all of the students to get the hours of hands-on welding training needed to fulfill class and program requirements.

“Before the renovation, we could accommodate eight students per class. The way it has worked is the students would go to class and then go to the lab, but we only had six welders, so they were already doubled up on machines. We now have 12 welders to accommodate the number of students we need to have in our lab at a time,” he said.

“Because we are offering AWS certification, they had to be top of the line welders so the students can get all of the AWS certifications we can offer,” he said.

American Welding Society (AWS) certification offers nine different certification categories from inspectors, supervisors and educators to radiographic interpreters, welding engineers and fabricators, to support students in advancing their careers.



*Peter Ricci of Sumner works on a welding project in MCC's open lab.*





*MCC Welding Instructor Andrew Naranjo, right, explains a welding concept to student Peter Ricci of Sumner.*

MCC Vice President for Administrative Services Connie Stewart, whose department manages facilities and maintenance needs, said the project rose to the top this year due to the immediate training needs identified by the college's skilled trades advisory committee.

"We work with individual employers in our area to provide the curriculum that is required to meet their business needs," she said. "We had to double the capacity in our welding lab to accommodate the existing number of students that we have."

The project included expansion of the existing welding lab into a larger space utilizing two rooms, as well as enhancing the associated equipment and support systems, such as electrical, HVAC and ventilation. In addition, another classroom was converted into a space for robotics training. Through careful planning, the college had funds available to cover the expense.

Spohr said local need for additional robotics training also prompted the conversion of another classroom into a space that has allowed the college to expand its robotics training capabilities.

"Many of the employers in our area have expressed a need for not just programming the robots but fixing them when they break," Spohr said. "The way the building was originally set up could not accommodate the need for this training. We needed a room dedicated to a tear-down robot because it needs a cage around it and other precautions to address safety requirements. We also needed to upgrade infrastructure such as power and HVAC to support the technology."

A new midsize FANUC tear-down robot has been added to support the need.

"Many of these types of robots are on the floor in our local companies," Spohr said. "Whether it's FANUC, ABB or KUKA, if you can tear down one, you can tear down



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-- MCC President Bob Ferrentino



any of them. And, it's not just about tearing down and fixing the robots – it's also preventative maintenance so they don't break down in the first place.”

“We are providing training to create a foundation of knowledge,” Ferrentino said. “If students understand the base approach, they can apply it in many settings.”

Spoehr agreed. “We hear from our advisory committee members that if we teach students the basics, the companies can then teach them the specific skills needed in their unique settings,” he said. “And, we can tailor specific training to support those needs.” ■

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